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Experience a Career While in High School

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Dear Friends,

We are rooting for spring to come soon! How about all of you? Spring always seems to ignite desires to try something new. If that is the case for you, how about seeking out an opportunity for your teen to try a career and see whether it's a good fit?

Internships and job shadowing are two ways to explore a teen's interest and passion. By way of definition, internships are "opportunities for students to gain experience in their field, determine if they have an interest in a particular career, create a network of contacts, or gain school credit" (Wikipedia). These associations are temporary positions that may be structured to last approximately 6-12 weeks; however, the time period is often flexible. They can be paid or volunteer positions.

Job shadowing, on the other hand, is the term used when high school students observe the work that people in a career of choice perform. These opportunities are generally shorter in duration to internships--one day, a week, or so--and are unpaid.

Now the questions become: When should my teen seek out an internship or job shadow position? What should I do to prepare my teen? Why should he take the time to participate in either one? Where can I find such opportunities?

When to Begin?

The middle to latter years of high school provide a good time to seek out a position. These are the years to help your teen begin narrowing down what he wants to do after high school graduation be it college, career, vo-tech training, or the military. This can be a daunting task because of the vast number of options open to our young people. By high school, you probably have identified areas of strengths and/or interests your teens have. So this becomes an opportune time to search out the possibilities of livelihood in those areas.

What Preparation is Helpful?

A career development course that you design as an elective would be a practical starting point. Teens can use the local library and the internet to delve deeper into careers of choice. These searches will help to identify several careers they are interested in learning more about. Maybe you'll need to make some suggestions in light of their abilities and talents.

Help your teen to create a resume as part of the course requirements. This document will provide a good introduction to the person or firm your teen is approaching for the internship. We have several [sources to help you](#) on our high school website. Include practice in deportment and interview skills which will give your teens confidence and professionalism in presenting themselves to those they will be contacting.

Consider designing a program for the internship your teens wish to have. This can be used when seeking the actual experience, especially if the organization has never offered an internship before. It will also show initiative on the part of your teen. Simply brainstorm with your teen concerning objectives he hopes to accomplish during the internship. For example, if your teen is interested in veterinary science, when he approaches your vet he may want to lay out these proposed goals:

- Learn how to properly care for a pet (immunizations, nutrition, exercise, grooming, etc.)
- Observe several surgical procedures

- Discover what records and documentation are kept for animal clients
- Be available for general office help
- Gather information about the marketing/advertising/bookkeeping aspects of the vet business

Your teen should also be prepared to communicate how many hours per week he is available and what total length of time he desires for the internship. Having these points for discussion will help the vet to envision what kind of experience your teen has in mind.

Why Intern or Shadow?

If you think back to when you were making career decisions, you probably remember romanticizing the job a bit, right? Your teens likely do the same thing. Actually being in the work environment will bring some realism to the job, and they'll be better able to determine whether this career is something they wish to pursue. If it is, then it'll provide the opportunity to find out what education is going to be necessary to achieve the desired position. That will give you much needed information on what types of courses to include in your high school program in order to provide the necessary pre-requisites. A side benefit may be a spark of motivation for your teen to diligently complete her high school courses.

Another advantage is that the experience will help to narrow down the choices of majors in post-high school settings. Hopefully, this will keep your teens from switching majors and adding on years of schooling.

Maybe your teens will learn new skills which can be added to their resumes. In our experiences, we have discovered that God never wastes learning opportunities. What may seem inconsequential now often comes in handy in a future setting. It is also a place for teens to learn how to amicably work for someone and with co-laborers. In addition, these situations will provide contacts for networking purposes and possible recommendations for future jobs.

Where are the Opportunities?

Remember, you are looking for an opportunity that interests your teen, so this will naturally limit your search. If you aren't sure where to begin, the [resource section of our website](#) offers some helpful sources. Your community is another good place to look for opportunities at the library, museums (docents), hospitals, zoos, and more.

Church members, neighbors, and relatives, who work in areas of interest to your teens may provide a natural contact for internships or job shadowing. One homeschooler was considering a career in medicine, but she was not certain whether to pursue medical school or a nursing degree. She met a physician who offered the chance to job shadow on one of her shifts. This gave an opportunity to speak to both physicians and nurses leading the young lady to decide that nursing was more suited to her. She went on to volunteer at a hospital as a nurse assistant before making application to nursing programs. This involvement ended up being a plus on her college application since the school of choice preferred students with some hospital experience.

Another homeschooler thought he wanted to be a financial consultant, so he contacted a church member who worked in that area. He was given a paid internship for a summer. Even though he worked as a "go-fer" and did clerical work, he was able to observe what a financial consultant's day entailed. It didn't take him long to decide this was not the career for him, freeing him up to look elsewhere.

A community bakery was the site of an internship for a homeschooler interested in becoming a pastry chef. She began working in the shop during high school and enjoyed it so much that after graduation, she turned the internship into an apprenticeship to learn the trade.

Your family may also provide a source for your teens to experience a career. One young man who wasn't sure what path he wished to travel after high school spent a summer working for his grandfather's milling business. By the end of the summer the teen knew that type of business was not for him, and he was motivated to investigate other options.

We have both seen the Lord open doors at just the right time for our families, and He will do the same for yours. Bring your requests to Him and trust that He will provide opportunities for your teen's talents and gifts to be used for His glory.

Next month read how outside courses can enhance your high school program. We will discuss their benefits, how to determine your teen's readiness, and possible sources.

Looking ahead,

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